



## **ROSS ON WYE ANGLING CLUB ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES**

**White Lion - 19.30hrs, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026**

**APOLOGIES:** Peter Richardson, Chris Dowling, David Hayworth, Mark Harrison, Mike Evans, Laurence Abbot, Ash Bailey.

**PREVIOUS AGM MINUTES:** Approved.

### **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT MARCH 2026**

#### **Introduction of Committee Members:**

Rob Leather – RoWAC Committee Chair

Gary Kent - Deputy Chairman Holds relationship with Benhall Farm. Organised cabinet and trophies.

Nick Simmonds – Membership Secretary. Processes over 350 memberships, manages Club Mate.

Paul Dowgill – Treasurer. Manages income and outgoings. Clubmate. Financial planning. HMRC.

Peter Richardson – Secretary. Helps run the Committee Meetings; publish agenda, minutes, correspondence outside the Club, liaison with Fish Legal. Wildlife Reporting Group.

Mike Evans – Head Bailiff. Been with the club over 25 years. Manages Day Ticket water (patrols twice a day) and looks after a lot of the bank work at Weir End.

Adrian Williams - Health and Safety Representative. Adrian provides the risk assessments that are on the website. Important role as it helps to protect our anglers on the banks, and it helps to protect the Club should we ever need to rely on our insurance.

Richard Woodhouse – Salmon Representative. Attends Wye Fisheries Group and reports on Salmon fishing and members interests along with long-time active member and former chairman Trevor Hyde.

Lyndon Bowen – De facto Maintenance Member. Organises work parties and gate/fence/platform repairs. Along with Steve and Chris, Lyndon opened up dormant swims along Weir End and Benhall.

Chris Dowling – supports bank maintenance and produces the RoWAC newsletter

Wes Brown – helps the Club with larger maintenance jobs. This year he'll be working at Upper Benhall.

John Cheyne – Works for the Angling Trust and I regard him as our resident fish and river expert. Welfare Officer and sorts out our competitions.

Jon Fox – Newest member of the committee. Lots of experience of committee work and that of angling clubs. Recently volunteered to take over the website management from Trevor Hyde. Jon produces your Club News page, so if you have any stories and photos of interest, please get in touch with Jon

Mark Harrison. Writes copy for PR/Campaigning work. Will be issuing a survey this year to discover what our members want from the committee.

Without these guys, the Club would not work. Lots of unseen work goes on, some of which I will attempt to summarise now.

### **President**

Dreda Darling, president for 3 years. The Darling estate also provides the Club with fishing opportunities on the Sellack beat outside the salmon season. The Club and Dreda's environmental and ecological interests are very much aligned and we hope to continue this long relationship with the Darling family into the future.

### **General Coarse Fishing Report**

Reasonable reports for 2025 season.

Most anglers seem to catch throughout the season, with very few blanks from members that I have heard of. Catches are certainly below what they were 5 years ago, with a rough average of 3-7 fish per visit to those who know the waters. Numerous perch touching the magical 4lb mark were reported, and the new swims opened up at Lower Weir End have produced some good barbel and chub. We have noticed a return of some of the ranunculi in this stretch which may in part account for the positive angling results.

### **Maintenance**

Maintenance work has continued a pace throughout 2025, with the employment of a contractor, the committee's own Wes Brown. Means we can combine the unique skills of a professional maintenance company, with the vested interests of a club member. Upper Benhall has had a major overhaul, with Lower Benhall in our sights when the river levels allow. In addition, we held a number of bank clearing sessions for members, with reasonable attendance.

Special mention must go out to Chris, Lyndon and Steve for their incredible proactive work in opening up swims all along the Weir End Section. They have been out on numerous occasions throughout the year, giving up their time and energy to provide the membership with access to some great new areas to fish.

The new platforms in the town have seen significant use and have provided the much easy access required by some of our day ticket anglers. They continue to remain resilient to the floods.

### **Club Newsletter**

I hope you have enjoyed Chris's newsletters as much as I have. I think they bring the Club alive and help spread our ethos amongst our membership. Long may they continue. As ever, please send any photos, stories or ideas to Chris for inclusion in his articles. Big thanks to Chris.

### **Wildlife Monitoring**

Our wildlife monitoring continues into 2026 and is run by Peter Richardson. It's a Whatsapp Group open to all members who post bird, insect and mammalian life they see during fishing trips. This data is collected by Peter and passed on the National Wildlife Organisations as part of their broader surveys. It's a fun group to belong to, and anyone wishing to join should contact Peter.

## **Website**

Our website is updated regularly; both with day-to-day things like risk assessments and club rules, but also, on a more personal level, the Club News pages. This is now done by Jon Fox. A great thanks goes out to Jon for dealing with the tech and keeping members engaged in the club. As ever, if you have any photos or stories to share, then Jon would be delighted to hear from you.

## **Competitions**

We had one competition this season, known as the 'Chub and Barbel Bash', which latterly was managed by Jon Fox. For the anglers that took part, it was a great day and it is something we will continue into 2026 and beyond. Badgers Baits provided the prizes on the day.

## **Our own Water**

Our search for a RoWAC still-water has taken a positive step forward and we are pleased to announce that we have made contact with the management team of a local, established 3-acre lake. We are hoping to become more involved with the lake over the next year so that we can achieve our long-standing goal of bringing more juniors to the sport through access to a still water. Several of the committee members will be exploring the viability of the lake we have found over the next few months, and we hope to share some positive news in the coming season.

## **Relationships**

Throughout 2025 we have maintained and expanded our relationships with:

- Local Angling Shops – now only one in town. We will be actively supporting them
- Tenant farmers who manage the land across which we have access
- Ross Town Council
- Angling Trust and Fish Legal
- River Action
- Several Local River Campaign groups
- The Duchy (now Prince William)
- The Darlings at Sellack
- Local and national media, including the BBC

## **River Pollution**

Fish Legal is still representing Ross on Wye Angling Club with our compliant against Natural Resource Wales with a view to restore the river to its former glory. We had regular meetings with them again this year, and took part in interviews and a photoshoot at Weir End.

Fish Legal has launched a Judicial Review against the Environment Agency in response to their Diffuse Water Pollution Plan for the River Wye Special Area of Conservation published in November 2025. In the report EA admitted that their own plan to tackle pollution in the River Wye will not work, yet declined to take decisive action to fix it.

In its own plan, the Environment Agency accepts that:

- the River Wye is in unfavourable condition
- existing controls have not delivered the required reductions in pollution
- even the new measures proposed are unlikely, at current uptake rates, to meet phosphate reduction targets
- environmental objectives will not be achieved without more fundamental change

Zoe Wedderburn-Day, Head of Policy and Strategy at Fish Legal commented *“The Environment Agency’s own plan accepts that the River Wye will not recover under the current approach. When the*

*law requires action, regulators cannot simply acknowledge failure and postpone hard decisions yet again. After years of delay and continuing damage to a protected river, that is no longer lawful."*

Although the solutions to the problem are obvious, they are not easy. However, due to the pressure put on by the nation (including by our club), things are slowly moving in the right direction:

1. Leigh Day, who the committee met with last year, have begun to take legal action on behalf of river users who feel they may have suffered due to the pollution and have signed up to their action. The Club supports the case but has not signed up to it, and we informed our membership of the opportunity to get free legal support from Leigh Day. This is on-going in the courts (High Court, filed September/October 2025):

Nearly 4,000 claimants (residents, businesses, river users) vs. Welsh Water + poultry firms (Avara Foods group).

Alleges sewage discharges (plus chicken manure) have caused nutrient/bacteria pollution, algal blooms, wildlife harm, odours, and economic/recreational damage to the Wye, Lugg, and Usk since ~2019. Claims private/public nuisance, trespass, and negligence. Seeks damages and court orders to stop polluting and restore the rivers.

Welsh Water denies liability. It highlights its £70 million+ Wye investments (more shortly) and argues any payout would reduce future environmental spending. Case is at early stages (defences to be filed; possible trial if not settled).

2. Avara (chicken producer in the Wye, owned by multinational Cargill) 2025 Roadmap: Avara published a "Sustainable Poultry Roadmap" with the public commitment: "By 2025, our supply chain will not contribute to excess phosphate in the River Wye." The manure-export policy is the central part of this plan. They have also published supply chain data and worked with the Wye & Usk Foundation.
3. Welsh Water. From them: has focused its River Wye cleanup efforts primarily on reducing phosphorus (phosphate) discharges from its wastewater treatment works (WWTWs), improving infrastructure to cut sewage spills, and implementing a company-wide Pollution Reduction Action Plan. These actions address its contribution to nutrient pollution and eutrophication in the Wye (and linked rivers like the Lugg and Usk), though the company stresses that agriculture (e.g., chicken manure) and other sources also play major roles.

Welsh Water has completed seven major schemes totalling £53 million across Herefordshire Wye sites delivered ahead of schedule. These upgrades install advanced phosphate-removal technology to treat wastewater before discharge, reducing algal blooms and improving aquatic life.

£27 million Hereford project (Eign and Rotherwas WWTWs): This introduced phosphate stripping processes at two key Hereford works discharging into the Wye system.

Broader commitments: 145 tightened environmental permits with NRW for phosphorus limits at WWTWs and assets in Special Area of Conservation (SAC) rivers (including the Wye).

Storm overflows and spills: Real-time public storm overflow map (updated hourly) for transparency.

#### Legal Cases and Fines:

Welsh Water has faced both criminal prosecutions (by regulators) and a Leigh Day claim related to the Wye.

#### Criminal fines/prosecutions (specific to Wye or Herefordshire Wye tributaries):

June 2024: Welsh Water fined £90,000 (plus costs; total penalties exceeded £100,000) at Worcester Crown Court for breaching environmental permit conditions at a Herefordshire sewage treatment works discharging into the River Wye.

July 2025: Welsh Water fined £36,000 at Kidderminster Magistrates Court for seven breaches at Clehonger Sewage Treatment Works (Herefordshire). Exceeded permitted ammonia levels in discharges to Cage Brook (a Wye tributary) between November 2020 and April 2021. Environment Agency case.

#### Other notable company-wide enforcement:

October 2024 (reduced October 2025): Initially fined £1.35 million by NRW for over 800 breaches of sewage discharge permits (mainly monitoring failures in 2020–2021); successfully appealed and reduced to £120,000 plus costs. Conviction stood.

March 2026: Ofwat enforcement package of £44.7 million (accepted by the company, which apologised) for “serious and unacceptable” failures to operate, maintain, and upgrade the wastewater network, leading to excessive spills. Includes £40.6 million for spill reduction/groundwater fixes and £4.1 million for river quality improvements in sensitive catchments.

Welsh Water denies liability. It highlights its £70 million+ Wye investments (ahead of targets) and argues any payout would reduce future environmental spending. Case is at early stages (defences to be filed; possible trial if not settled).

#### **Plans for 2026**

Business as usual! I am pleased with the actions and direction of the committee so you can expect to see more of the same, only better.

The bank maintenance will be stepped up a notch at Lower Weir End, and you will see more swims with better access. We will also be fitting permanent chains to the town platforms to allow better access (the ropes we installed having been ‘liberated’ by the local youth)

We will continue to promote the Club to keep our membership numbers healthy. Another ‘new members’ walk will take place in June for those keen new members willing and able to take the 5-mile tour of our fishery.

We have purchased a ‘stand-alone temperature monitoring system which we will be installing as soon as the river levels allow. The river temp will be available 24hrs a day, 365 days a year via our website. Will help to monitor the temps in the river in the summer for fish health, and will provide a good indication of the fishing conditions in the winter when we all look for that all-important temp rise that may offer a cold-water feeding window.

We will continue to engage with club members through friendly competitions, a survey and the newsletter, and we will stay engaged in the struggle against pollution.

All this of course is done to preserve and protect our pastime and the environment we so much enjoy, to provide affordable fishing, with all the benefits it provides to as many anglers as possible.

As well as the usual administrative and financial management of the club, we will continue the quest for our own water.

That is the end of the Chairmans report for March 2026. I will take questions at the end of the meeting.

## **SECRETARY ANNUAL REPORT MARCH 2026**

### **Committee meetings:**

The committee has been active in 2025 and 2026 both in person and online, with committee meetings held in January, March, April, June and December 2025 and March 2026. We trialled conducting some committee business largely online for the latter half of last year, and while the club was effectively managed in that time – including coordinating bank clearing work and making decisions on the status of the fishery in extreme summer conditions – the committee has decided to return to running committee meetings at least every other month throughout the year for the remainder of the 2026/2027 season.

### **Work with Fish Legal:**

In 2025 we strengthened our relationship with Fish Legal, with the photo-shoot down at the Salmon Hut last year as mentioned in the Chairman's report, and regular check-ins with myself and Fish Legal's Zoe Wedderburn-Day with regard to our existing complaint against Natural Resources Wales (NRW). We will be submitting a consultation response next month to the NRW's consultation on their River Basin Management Plans, which will stress the need for phosphate pollution mitigation measures for the Wye which will be fully aligned with Fish Legal's response.

In addition, we have agreed to work with Fish Legal on their new Judicial Review case against the Environment Agency's Diffuse Water Pollution Plan for the River Wye Special Area of Conservation. Along with Fish Legal, we do not believe this plan is adequate to tackle the pollution crisis in the River Wye, indeed we expressed our views in two articles published in the Hereford Times at the beginning of 2026 (e.g. "Ross On Wye Angling Club Slams Environment Agency's New Plan" 9th January 2026 - [www.herefordtimes.com/news/25753255.ross-wye-angling-club-bitterly-disappointed-environment-agency/](http://www.herefordtimes.com/news/25753255.ross-wye-angling-club-bitterly-disappointed-environment-agency/)).

Fish Legal have issued an initial claim against the EA as part of the Judicial Review, and if no alternative dispute resolution is agreed by the 1st May (i.e. that EA agree to our demands for the consideration of an emergency Water Protection Zone order) we will support Fish Legal in a full Judicial Review case with a supporting witness statement from the Club. Fish Legal will use the photographs they took of the Club last year in any publicity relating to the Judicial Review case this year.

## **TREASURER'S REPORT 31 MARCH 2026**

Overall, the club remains in a sound financial position and, as a result, the committee proposes that there will be no membership fee increases for 2026 (detail redacted).

## **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY ANNUAL REPORT**

The club membership is in a healthy state with membership full at 350 members. There is also a waiting list of 140 (of which 38 are local), showing the popularity of the club's coarse fishing. With an attrition rate of roughly 35 to 45 per year, this may mean up to a 3 year wait for membership.

Salmon membership is currently 22 with one further possible new member. This is against an allocation of 35 members.

### **SALMON SECTION ANNUAL REPORT – 2025 SEASON**

Last year I reported on how the 2024 season produced the lowest catch on the Wye for over 100 years. Well, 2025 was far worse with just 64 salmon reported caught on the whole river according to figures from the Wye Salmon Association. That is well under half of the 2024 official catch of 153 fish as compiled by the Environment Agency from anglers returns, and this figure is probably understated as, unfortunately, not all salmon anglers complete their legally required salmon catch return

This extremely low catch was, I believe, severely affected by the long drought lasting several months from late spring to early autumn. This meant salmon were either unable or reluctant to run the river, at least until the drought finally broke in mid-September.

At the start of the season, we had almost ideal river levels at Ross, and hopes were high. But, from the river, only a few early fish were caught. It was as if the salmon sensed there was a drought on the way and stayed at sea or dropped into the deep holding pools, where they stayed semi-comatose to await better conditions.

At Ross the only early season action was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March at Benhall, when Matt Cooper unfortunately had a fish drop off just as it was nearing the net. He estimated it would have been in the mid-Teens of pounds, a typical Wye spring salmon.

By the end of April, the river was at low summer level and stayed this way for the next five months. As a result salmon angling effort reduced as the river levels fell, although there was a bright spot in May, when Roy Jacobs landed a magnificent sea trout weighing 7lbs 5ozs from Weirend.

During the summer, salmon fishing on the whole river came to an almost complete standstill, but a few fish did try to move during a rise in water levels of a few centimetres at the beginning of August. This was evidenced when Roy Jacobs was out again, this time after perch with a light spinning outfit and a tiny plastic lure. But instead of perch he landed a salmon estimated as weighing between 10 and 12 lbs, thereby opening our 2025 account. This was caught from below Wilton Bridge (*Technical note: whilst Roy was actually coarse fishing at the time, he is a licensed salmon member and was using a legitimate salmon fishing method within the salmon season, so the fish is counted in official totals. But a salmon caught accidentally by a coarse only member, on say boilies or other bait, would not.*)

This fish remained the only salmon caught on club waters until the 28<sup>th</sup> September, when Matt Cooper, fishing at the tail-end of the first decent spate since Spring, landed a 9lb hen salmon on the fly from Hom Stream. This was followed up on the 9th October when Steve Boswell landed a brace of cock salmon from Weirend, both on fly. Although they were not weighed, each was measured at 36 inches and estimated to have been in the mid to upper teens of pounds.

And that was it. A season dominated by the long drought that lasted from mid-Spring right through to the beginning of autumn. But at least the club ended on a positive note with 4 fish in a dreadful year. This made us one of the top beats on the whole of the river, with only neighbouring Goodrich Court (5) and the expensive beats below Monmouth of Wyesham (23) and Bigsweir (10) having recorded higher totals.

### **ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE**

The existing committee were all prepared to stand for re-election and it was proposed by Kim Harman and seconded by Steve Cole that they be re-elected on block. This was carried unanimously.

**GUEST SPEAKER HADRIAN WHITTLE: “THREATS TO THE WYE FISHERY – AN INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE”**

Hadrian, a well-known and long-standing successful match angler on the Wye, lead a discussion about the problems that he is seeing first hand with the river. He sees these as pollution, loss of the Ranunculus, and in particular, fish-eating birds (FEBs), especially cormorants, although he acknowledged goosanders and mergansers are also a problem. These he says are devastating the roach, dace and bleak populations with catches of these fish well down on the levels of the past. He asked if the committee could do more against the background of the current stance with FEBs by the EA and NRW. During the discussion it was highlighted that the problem for ROWAC, notwithstanding the difficulty of obtaining a permit which would only be for 3 birds, is that much of our fishery is on public footpaths, and then whether the Dutchy would approve the application. It was agreed the committee would discuss this at the next meeting, especially with whether the numbers of these birds on our waters can be recorded.

**ATTENDEES:** The AGM was attended by 35 members, the largest number for some years.